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The 12th International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology (SysMus19)

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Abstract

At the 12th International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology (SysMus19), students from all over the world came together to share and discuss their work spanning this interdisciplinary and diverse field. As a student-led conference, the SysMus series aims to provide a platform whereby early-stage researchers can hone their skills and gain experience in an open and friendly environment. Additionally, keynotes held by Dr. Klaus Frieler (Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt, Weimar) and Dr. Helga de la Motte-Haber (Technische Universität Berlin), as well as workshops on different research tools and approaches, added to the depth and variety of the event. This report provides an overview of the conference and a summary of the work presented.

Keywords

Conference report, music psychology, student conference, SysMus, systematic musicology

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The 12th International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology (SysMus19) took place September 10–12, 2019 and was held at the SRH Hochschule der populären Künste (hdpk) in Berlin, Germany, a city famed for its musical and cultural history.

About SysMus

The SysMus conference series was established by Dr. Manuela Marin and Professor Richard Parncutt with the aim of providing students an opportunity to hone their skills and experience presenting their work in a professional but less formal environment. First held in Austria in 2008, it has since been maintained as an annual event, with Masters, PhD, and even some Bachelors students attending and presenting research. As an international event, each year sees a different host institution in a different country, with SysMus18 having been held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Led by students, for students, the conference sets a platform whereby young researchers can present their work and share ideas and inspirations with other early-stage researchers. Although using the umbrella term of Systematic Musicology (first coined by Adler, 1885), in reality the presentations come from a wide range of approaches, from historical perspectives to empirical scientific research. The inclusion of keynotes from world-renowned professors in the field and expert-led workshops add to the depth, variety, and richness of content on offer during the three-day event.

SysMus19

This year SysMus hosted over 50 students from institutions spanning the globe, with some participants traveling from as far as Mexico and Hong Kong. The Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research (SEMPRE) awarded travel grants to 17 attendees to cover fees and expenses.

The event was organised by a team of students at the SRH Hochschule der populären Künste (EN: SRH College of Popular Arts), led by Isabell Botsch and supervised by

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Dr. Richard von Georgi. In total, 55 abstracts were accepted for presentation which, after cancelations, resulted in 34 spoken presentations and 13 poster presentations, covering an array of topics including health, well-being, education, empirical aesthetics, social interaction, and performance. The two keynote presentations were given by Dr. Klaus Frieler (Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt, Weimar) and Dr. Professor Emerita Helga de la Motte-Haber (Technische Universität Berlin), with four workshops rounding off the final day of the event.

Keynotes

The opening ceremony was followed by a robust and engaging keynote given by Dr. Frieler entitled *Digital jazz research: A transdisciplinary approach*. In this talk he discussed the methods and results of work carried out as part of the Jazzomat Research Project (Pfleiderer & Frieler, 2010) and the "Dig That Lick" project over the last 7 years, and some of their resultant outputs (e.g. Frieler et al., 2018, 2019). He presented this work as a prototypical example of a transdisciplinary approach to music research, combining the application of classical musicological methods, computational music analysis, and qualitative annotations (among others) to the study of jazz music. He argued for the necessity of the integration of all of these elements to paint a coherent and complete picture of the genre and address the complexity of interactions between musical content, cultural practices, and the underlying psychological mechanisms that inform practices such as soloing and improvisation.

The following day featured a keynote from the highly renowned Prof. de la Motte-Haber providing a presentation entitled *The psychology of spatial perception and its significance for art*. With contributions in over 300 publications, including her role as the editor of the German six-volume *Handbook of Systematic Musicology* (de la Motte-Haber et al., 2004), over a career that has been defined by such seminal contributions in systematic musicology and music psychology, it was truly an honor to have Prof. de la Motte-Haber as a contributor to the SysMus conference. In her presentation, she gave a broad overview of her long career in musicology and perception study, illustrated through numerous examples of the use of psychoacoustic phenomena for the creation of both scientific knowledge (e.g. Kolarik et al., 2015) and artistic works (e.g. Lucier & Simon, 2012). The keynote showed how artists, like all people, have an implicit understanding of spatial perception that they exploit in their work, but explicit knowledge through important results on visual and acoustic perception is needed to explain these effects.

Posters and Presentations

Presentations ran in two parallel sessions with two or three talks per session. The themes covered by the sessions were well-being, musical analysis, methods, development, audience, media, social interaction, performance, empirical aesthetics, education, health, sociology, dance, and synchronisation. The talks themselves covered a variety of topics within each theme, including discussions of representations of spiritual music in early 20th-century film (Cécile Chéraqui, Sorbonne Université), the use of music listening interventions in clinical settings (Claire Howlin, University College Dublin), and evolutionary perspectives on the social functions of dance (Joshua Bamford, University of Oxford).

The poster sessions offered a further means of research dissemination. Much as with the spoken presentations, the poster presentations covered a range of topics, including the impact of different contexts on the listening experience (Cristina Harney, University of Leeds), the effects of attentional focus on motor skill performance (Emma Allingham, University of Hamburg), and the modulation of expressive features in musical performance versus teaching (Atsuko Tominaga, Central European University, Hungary). In a spirited move, Prof. Katrin Starcke (SRH Hochschule der populären Künste (hdpk), Berlin) augmented her poster entitled *Don't drink and chill: Effects of alcohol on subjective and physiological reactions during music listening* with a bottle of vodka, inviting attendees to experience her results first-hand.

Of the spoken presentations, six were nominated for the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music (ESCOM) award for best contribution, conducted through surveys completed by conference attendees.

Niklas Wohlt (University of Technology Braunschweig) was nominated for his talk on *Subjective well-being and coping in music-related professions: A comparison of music teachers, instrumental teachers, and musicians*. Here, he discussed comparisons between different music-related professions and their practitioners' subjective well-being and coping strategies. Also during the well-being session, Charlotte Madden (SRH Hochschule der populären Künste (hdpk), Berlin) received a nomination for her talk *Subjective well-being: The role of personality, use of music, and sexual satisfaction*, looking into the relationships between these factors and a person's health and quality of life. Annaliese Micallef Grimaud (Durham University) discussed a novel methodological design for conducting research into musical emotions in her talk *A recipe for emotion: Altering emotion perception through musical parameters*, which was followed by Alvaro Chang-Arana (Aalto University) and his talk *A performance-based measure for research in empathy and music*, for two nominations in the methods session. Alan van Keeken (University of Freiburg) received a nomination for his talk *Musical objects of popular culture: Uncovering socio-technical trajectories of musical cultures through artefact analysis*.

The award was ultimately given to Anna Détári (University of York) for her talk *Musician's Focal Dystonia: A*

mere neurological disorder? The possible role of non-organic factors in the onset of Musician's Focal Dystonia: An exploratory grounded theory study. Anna's work looks at the causes underlying the condition and proposes directions for improving therapies, with her own personal experience informing her passionate discussion.

Allowing the students to decide the outcome of the best contribution award further exemplified the ethos behind SysMus. However, it should be noted that no poster presentations were considered for an award; allowing contributions from all presentations to be eligible for an award could be beneficial for future conferences.

Workshops

Workshops rounded off the final day, with four options available to give attendees insight into aspects of different research practices. Keynote speaker Dr. Frieler gave a workshop on *Computers in systematic musicology*, demonstrating a range of software and highlighting the integral aspect of computers in research. Prof. Marco Kuhn's (SRH Hochschule der populären Künste (hdpk), Berlin) workshop on *Controlling sound through body movement* gave an overview of different interfaces which can be used to control sound by body movements. Van Keeken, following his award-nominated presentation, gave a workshop on *Artefact analysis of musical objects*, and Prof. Starcke discussed the use of *Peripheral physiology in music psychology*.

Workshops in this environment provide a nice interface between the conference attendees and the host institution's faculty and facilities and an opportunity to learn in a more hands-on way. However, as these were run in parallel and at the end of the conference following the closing ceremony, there were some issues. Many conference participants had to leave early following the closing ceremony, and some expressed difficulty in deciding which workshop to attend. As the workshops may not necessarily be entirely relevant or useful for everyone, there is an argument for considering these as "optional extras." However, for those attendees who may have felt that they would have benefited from more than one of these workshops, a better way of integrating them into the program is a goal for future conferences. At SysMus20, organisers have addressed this by planning a full day of workshops prior to the main conference in order to give attendees the opportunity to attend all workshops on offer.

Social Activities

Putting the academics aside, conferences offer a unique opportunity for networking and engaging with one's peers. Thus, the social program is an important aspect and not to be neglected. For SysMus19, this started before the conference began, with the pre-conference get-together on the evening before the first day of the conference. Simply a dinner out at a nearby venue, this was a good chance for the early arrivals to break the ice, and for already familiar acquaintances to catch up.

The first day of the conference proper was followed by an optional "alternative" tour of Berlin. Two groups were taken around the less "tourist obvious" parts of the city, with a particular angle on the city's musical and cultural history. Tour guides imparted fascinating knowledge of the history of the city's punk movement, Berlin's unique street art culture, and pirate radio prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall. One group's tour culminated in an area called Yaam, an African "beach club oasis" by the river with bars, music, and delicious food. The penultimate evening saw the main social gathering, a buffet put on by conference organisers in central Berlin.

Summary and Closing Remarks

Organising any conference or symposium day can be challenging—a tough balancing act to create the right mix of presentations and discussions while allowing plenty of time for socialising and networking. This year's SysMus carried this off with aplomb. Many an in-depth conversation could be overheard during the breaks as researchers came together relating similar projects, asking for advice, or simply catching up. Some of the Bachelors students in attendance took the opportunity to seek advice and inspiration towards pursuing the next stages of their study, and undoubtedly found plenty to think about over the course of the event.

SysMus20 will be held September 15–17, 2020 at the Department of Music at the University of York, UK, and organised by Diana Kayser and Dr. Hauke Egermann from the York Music Psychology Group. The invited keynote speakers are Prof. Ian Cross (University of Cambridge) and Dr. Freya Bailes (University of Leeds), and SEMPRE travel awards will once again be made available for presenters. More information about SysMus20 can be found at https://sites.google.com/york.ac.uk/sysmus2020.

Author contribution

Both authors contributed notes, comments, and individual sections to this report. RK compiled the main draft. Both authors reviewed and edited the manuscript and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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